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## HORACE MANN'S COUNTRY SCHOOL.

The country school as it existed in the thought of Horace Mann had nothing in common with the college or the university. In his mind the education of the child of the humblest laborer in the commonwealth was of as much consequence as that of the child born to an inheritance of millions. The act defining his duties, after enumerating certain methods of work, declares the end to be, "that the children depending on the common schools for instruction may have the best education which those schools can be made to impart." In his time, when people talked of the common schools, they had in mind the country school, the little red school house of which Whittier wrote:

"Still sits the school house by the road,  
A ragged beggar sunning;  
Around it still the sumachs grow,  
And blackberry vines are running."

The entire school nomenclature of the present day is a new invention, which would have been senseless jargon in the ears of those who lived in the times of Horace Mann. Of state universities, of agricultural colleges, of secondary schools, of manual training, of university extension, he had no occasion to learn, and so was left free to concentrate the powers of his mind upon his work in behalf of the common district school. He recognized the apathy, the absolute indifference of the people, as a great evil. In order to remedy this he scattered circulars and letters everywhere; he enlisted the prominent men of the commonwealth; he gathered information from every possible source and spread it broadcast among the people. But the most powerful means which he used was his personal presence and his addresses. He went from village to village and from hamlet to hamlet, preaching everywhere to the common people the saving gospel of education; and the common people heard him gladly.

His words came to them like water to the thirsty soul, and like bread to the hungry.

Secondary schools, high schools, city supervision, manual training, have usurped nearly the entire educational field, while the schools in which the children of the farm laborer, the miner, the rural community, must receive at best a limited education, sit in the valley of the shadow of ignorance waiting for their redemption. The country schools in every state need an educational regeneration; a fresh baptism into the spirit of Horace Mann.

It is to be noted here that the subjects of his lectures were calculated to enlist the sympathies of his audience. They appealed to the common heart of the populace. (There is danger that as a profession we may yet become too professional) Psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, scientific teaching, are all well enough when we are debating among ourselves; but if we expect to interest and instruct the people we must talk common sense. When he said: "The mobs, the riots, the burnings, the lynchings, perpetrated by the men of the present day are perpetrated because of their vicious or defective education when children;" and again when he said, "If we permit the vulture's eggs to be incubated and hatched, it will then be too late to take care of the lambs," he was lecturing upon "Means and Objects of Common School Education." He once used these words: "If republican institutions give greater scope and impulse to the lower order of faculties belonging to the human mind, then they must give also more authoritative control and more skillful guidance to the higher ones. If they multiply temptations they must fortify against them. If they quicken the activity and enlarge the sphere of the appetites and passions, they must at least in an equal ratio establish the authority and extend the jurisdiction of reason and conscience." He was talking to the people concerning the "Necessity of Education in a Republican Government."

In his lecture, "What God does and what He leaves for man to do in the work of Education," he combines more pure pedagogy than is sometimes contained in an entire volume which is put into the teacher's hand to study. The work of the creature must apply and supplement the work of the Creator.

"Surely," he says, speaking of the training of children, "in no other department of life is knowledge so indispensable; surely in no other is it so little sought for. In no other navigation is there such danger of wreck; in no other is there such blind pilotage." He was speaking to a promiscuous audience, not to one composed of teachers alone.

I have dwelt at some little length upon this point, because I know that if we expect to rescue the common district school from its present low estate we must catch the spirit of Horace Mann, and talk to the people in plain, unmistakable language concerning the duty as well as the necessity of providing for every child in the state the best education possible, at the public expense. Ministers have lately discovered that if they wish to convert sinners they must go where sinners are. If we ever reach the people to convert them to our way of thinking, educationally, we must go where the people can hear us. We must bring common truths home to the conscience of the people. We have no need of a Moses to lead us a tedious journey of forty years through the wilderness, but we do need a Joshua who can stand by the river, even when it fills all its banks, and bid the priests who bear the ark of popular education go forward and stand in the midst of the stream, that the people may pass over dry-shod.

It is a most serious question which confronts us in many localities: what can we do more than we are doing to arouse an intelligent enthusiasm in behalf of better schools? We are having fair success in many cities, although even there many ignorant and unworthy men are elected to the board of education, often through party politics. But in many country districts in every state where population is scarce and school houses far apart, apathy, ignorance and indifference brood like a thick cloud over the entire community. When national and state associations are busy with the mint, the anise and the cumin, who is there left to attend to the weightier matters of the law? There are two questions which claim the attention of the public just now. The one is how to obtain better results from the work done in the elementary schools in our towns and villages; the other is how to raise the character of the instruction

given in the common country school. The Committee of Ten which can solve these questions will build for themselves a monument more enduring than brass. These are far above all questions concerning secondary or collegiate education.

It is interesting to note the importance which Horace Mann attached to the rudimental branches. He says of the normal school then just started at Barre: "There are fifty students in attendance, which number might have been doubled if the instructors would have consented to carry them forward into algebra and chemistry and astronomy and geometry, instead of subjecting them to a thorough review of common school studies." He evidently preferred for the district school that a teacher should be thoroughly prepared in a few important branches, rather than have a superficial omniscience gained by a cursory study of every known branch of knowledge. (Thoroughness in preparation induces thoroughness in work; a superficial preparation renders thoroughness in instruction impossible.

Horace Mann's teacher for the district school must possess aptness to teach, as well as knowledge, which he says embraces a knowledge of methods and processes. He adds: "He who is apt to teach is acquainted not only with common methods for common minds, but with peculiar methods for pupils of peculiar dispositions and temperaments." The best normal schools are not always those with the finest buildings, or the most extended curriculum, but those in which the students study and apply "the principles of all methods," so that they may vary their modes of instruction to suit the individual wants of the child.

The era of individuality is at our doors, and the teacher of the future will be compelled to deal with the pupils as his wants of each one may require. Rules, regulations and systems must give way, and the individual child must be enthroned as the one supreme object for whose welfare the school was established. This was Horace Mann's idea. It can best be carried out in the country school, but it can nowhere be successfully done unless the teacher possesses and is governed by the teaching spirit. The teacher in the country school, isolated in her work, with but little advice or supervision,



finds here her only solace; her only refuge from the dull monotony of hearing lessons and keeping order.

But Horace Mann's teacher must also possess the power to govern and control her school, not necessarily through fear, for love is far better and more enduring. Yet when love fails, force must be called in, for disobedience is the open gate to all evil influences. He, however, expresses a pungent truth when he says, "Children coming from homes where they have always been accustomed to love and sympathy, should expect to find love and sympathy in the school; and those coming from homes in which there is no love and no sympathy, above all others, ought to find these in their teachers."

As Horace Mann desired that teachers for the district schools should be prepared in the common branches, he did not hesitate to deprecate the tendency, even in his day, to increase the number of branches in the common schools. What would he have said could he have inspected the course of study in some of our high schools? Said an earnest teacher the other day, "We have so many things to do, so much instruction to give in different branches, that we have no time to build character." And yet character endures, when knowledge fails. "If there be tongues they shall cease; if there be knowledge it shall vanish away. Now abideth these three, faith, hope, love."

Horace Mann's idea was very far from confining instruction in the country schools to the three R's. Whatever has a tendency to make the boy more useful on the farm, or to make the life of the farm more attractive to him; whatever will make the daughter more useful in the home, or make the home a place of supreme pleasure to her, may legitimately be taught in the district school. The subjects taught in the country school ought to bear a close relation to country life. The great storehouse of nature opens her doors and displays her treasures to the rural school. Seedtime and harvest, bud and flower, blossom and fruit, the care of animals, singing birds and running streams, can be made the source of lessons useful as well as pleasant to the children. The country school is shorn of half its usefulness because the teacher is not able to rise to the height of her opportunities. And what a wonderful opportunity she has to teach

the pupil to "translate forms of beauty into thought, and thought into words."

To make a system of education effective, it must be in accord with its environments. The country school should be thoroughly countrified; it should never put on metropolitan airs. It is not desirable that the country school should keep equal pace with the city system in the character and kind of studies introduced in it; but especially in nature studies, and in elementary science as bearing upon agriculture and rural life, the curriculum of the country school should be greatly enlarged. What the city school ought to do in fitting boys for the office or for professions, the country school must do in fitting boys and girls for the farm. Just as soon as the farmers in the agricultural sections of the land find that the school is making the boys and girls more useful on the farm, more intelligent and more contented to remain at home, they will value it for its usefulness and rally to its support.

In an article in the *Common School Journal*, then, in 1840, edited by Horace Mann, the writer, after enumerating a long list of eminent men, says of them: "All common school men, some scarcely that, but yet all educated man, because they were made alive." The school, whether it be in the city or country, which does not do this for the pupils is failing of its purposes. We have lost sight, to some extent, of the purposes of school education and possibly we may have to go back to the country school of Horace Mann in order to get our bearings again.

I do not say we do not, but I do say we ought to turn out of our common schools reasonable, thinking, live men and women, anxious to be of service to mankind, eager for knowledge, with a quickened conscience, with the seeds of growth planted so deep that neither drought nor frost can reach them; growing year by year like the young sapling of the forest which does not reach its maturity until it has been nourished by the sunshine of a hundred summers, and has breasted the storms and winds of a hundred winters. He is educated, then, "Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

But where are we to get our teachers fitted for this work? This is true, that no state in the Union is so thoroughly equipped with

normal schools as to be able to give all her teachers a professional training. This is also true, that that normal school takes apparently highest rank which approaches nearest to being a well equipped college. I do not object to this, and yet but few of the graduates of these schools will find their work permanently in the country. The state must bring its normal training close to the farmer's door.

O the pitiless, merciless, barbarous experimenting which is being practiced upon thousands of American children in the schoolrooms! The blind teaching them to see; the dumb teaching them to talk; the lame and the halt teaching them the grace of motion. It is a sin which cries to heaven. Horace Mann tells this story. A bystander after witnessing a wonderful operation upon the eyes performed by the most skillful oculist in London, asked him, "How in the world did you learn to do it?" He replied, "By practice, but I spoil a bushel basketful of eyes in learning how."

The state should inaugurate a series of normal schools, one in each county, or at least in each congressional district, with a curriculum confined almost exclusively to elementary branches, the course to be completed in two years, and in charge of the best instructors whom money can get. Then we may look for the dawn of the educational millenium; the day when the doors of the public school will be locked against every candidate who has not had some special preparation for her work. Then the seedtime shall not fail, and thousands of happy children shall yearly celebrate the harvest home of knowledge.

There are but two other points to be touched upon. Long and earnestly did Horace Mann labor to reform the architecture of the country school house. From his day to this there have been spurts, spasms of reform, but nothing lasting; there never will be suitable buildings, built with regard to health, comfort and convenience, in accordance with the laws of sanitary science, and of civilized decency, until the state exerts its authority and compels it as a prerequisite of obtaining a share of the public funds. It will take years to reach this conclusion, but the agitation should begin now and bear with it the active influence and co-operation of this National Educational Association.

Finally, the district school house must be the rallying point for every influence which tends to elevate or benefit mankind. Within its walls should be kept the district library; the museum of specimens gathered and labeled by the children; the herbarium of flowers and leaves which the children have gathered on the prairies or the hills. Here may be held the country lyceum, the debating society, the singing school. No matter if religious meetings and Sunday schools are held there, provided the religious conscience can be so elevated that the worshipers will not desecrate the room by tobacco, nor purloin the books of the pupils. Here may be held historical or scientific lectures for the benefit of both parents and pupils. The surroundings should be sightly and attractive. Trees and flowers and shrubs should adorn the grounds, which should be scrupulously cared for. In short, the district school house and the grounds should have such a hold upon the community that they would be the last places which they would permit to be desecrated by the vandal or the tramp. This would be the district school as Horace Mann would have it.



## EXCERPTS FROM HORACE MANN.

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**LIBRARIES.**—How can this flood of pernicious reading be stayed? It must be done, if done at all—in the expressive language of Dr. Chalmers —“by the expulsive power of a new affection.” A purer current of thought at the fountain can alone wash the channels clean. For this purpose I know of no plan, as yet conceived by philanthropy, which promises to be so comprehensive and efficacious as the establishment of good libraries in all our school districts, open respectively to all the children in the state, and within half an hour’s walk of any spot upon its surface.

**WANTED MEN.**—No doubt a college-boy will learn more Greek and Latin if it is generally understood that college honors are to be mainly awarded for proficiency in those languages; but what care we though a man can speak seven languages, or dreams in Hebrew or Sanscrit, because of their familiarity, if he has never learned the language of sympathy for human suffering, and is deaf when the voice of truth and duty utters their holy mandates? We want men who feel a sentiment, a consciousness of brotherhood for the whole human race. We want men who will instruct the ignorant, not delude them, who will succor the weak, not prey upon them. We want men who will fly to the moral breach when the waters of desolation are pouring in, and who will stand there, and if need be, die there, applause or no applause.

**FREE SCHOOLS.**—In a social and political sense, it is a free school system. It knows no distinction of rich and poor, of bond and free, or between those, who, in the imperfect light of this world, are seeking, through different avenues, to reach the gate of heaven. Without money and without price, it throws open its doors, and spreads the table of its bounty for all the children of the state. Like the sun, it shines not only upon the good, but upon the evil, that they may become good; and, like the rain, its blessings descend not only upon the just, but upon the unjust, that their injustice may depart from them, and be known no more.

**DEEDS.**—Deeds survive the doers. In the highest and most philosophic sense, the asserted brevity of human life is a fiction. The act remains, though the hand that wrought it may have perished. And when our spirits shall have gone to their account, and the dust of our bodies shall be blown about by the winds, or mingled with the waves, the force which our life shall have impressed upon the machinery of things will continue its momentum, and work out its destiny upon the character and happiness of our descendants.



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